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## ***About Insomnia***

Many adults have suffered from symptoms of insomnia at one point in their life. Insomnia is a sleep disorder in which a person has difficulty falling asleep and/or maintaining sleep through out the night. Loss of sleep can be caused by multiple factors like stress, depression or life event changes. Insomnia is a very common sleep disorder that can be diagnosed and treated. Women and the elderly are the most common targets of this disorder. There are two types of insomnia, primary and secondary.

The causes of primary insomnia are environmental influences that a person may encounter and are not related to other health conditions. In contrast, secondary insomnia is related to other issues such as health conditions, chronic pain, medication or other substances one is consuming, like alcohol.

## **Causes of insomnia**

Insomnia can also be classified by the amount of time one is affected by it. Acute insomnia is a short-term ordeal, where difficulty sleeping is sporadic, or may last for only a few weeks. However, chronic insomnia is long-term. Chronic insomnia is distinguished by being unable to sleep for at least three nights per week, and can last for a month or longer.

The causes of acute insomnia are most often related to irregular conditions in a person's day-to-day life experiences. Significant stress from life like the loss of a loved one, loosing a job or divorce can cause trouble sleeping. Illness, physical strain or medications may disrupt a person's sleep cycle for a period of time as well. Some medications for colds, allergies or depression can act as stimulants. If this is the case, speak with your healthcare provider to find an alternative that will not disrupt your sleep.

Chronic insomnia is related to other underlying conditions such as depression or anxiety, pain or discomfort during the night or chronic stress. If the trouble sleeping is related to a medical condition, it is imperative that the medical condition is addressed. Loss of sleep while ill may lead to decreased ability to recover from an illness. In addition, treating the medical condition causing ones' insomnia will most often relieve the symptoms of insomnia.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

There are various signs and symptoms of insomnia. Commonly sufferers of insomnia report the inability to fall asleep, waking during the night, failure to return to sleep after waking or waking up too early in the morning. Unrefreshed rest resulting from a pattern of sleep difficulties may cause significant daytime sleepiness and general fatigue. These symptoms can lead to irritability, problems concentrating or memory problems. Insomnia is one of the leading causes of absenteeism from work and decreased productivity while at work. Fatigue and tiredness may leave a person feeling drained at the end of the day, which can also negatively influence their quality of life while at home.

Women specifically can suffer from insomnia due to fluctuating hormone levels at specific points in their life cycle. Sleeplessness may be caused by menopause, menstruation and pregnancy.

## **Steps to insure sleep**

You can make several helpful choices to encourage a restful night of sleep. The first and most basic being listening to your own "internal clock". Your sleep-wake cycle is regulated by your own Circadian Rhythm, which is a portion of the body's "internal clock". When you begin a new sleep pattern, your body's sleep clock is still on its original schedule and wants to sleep at its preprogrammed time. This is the most basic reason why you may still feel tired even though you are able to sleep. If you are having trouble sleeping, there are steps that can be taken to promote a restful night. Some basic sleep hygiene steps (steps to promote sleep) are:

- Fall asleep at the same time every night, including weekends. Also, ensure you are getting the proper amount of sleep that your body desires.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that may keep you awake. Alcohol, although it can make a person feel sleepy, can also reduce sleep quality leaving one feeling fatigued in the morning.
- Get regular exercise, studies show exercise may reduce stress and promote restful sleep. However, do not exercise within 3-4 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid heavy meals before bedtime. However, if you are hungry, a light snack before bed may actually help you sleep.
- Make sure your bedroom and bed are comfortable. Keep your sleep environment dark, quiet and at a comfortable temperature, not too cool, not too warm. If light is a problem, try blackout curtains or a sleep mask, if noise is a problem, try a white noise machine, a fan or ear plugs.
- Have a time to relax before bed. Reading a book or taking a bath may promote relaxation.
- Do not use the bedroom for anything other than sleep or sex.
- If you are unable to sleep and do not feel drowsy, get up. Engage in something that is relaxing like reading or listening to music.
- While in bed if you find your mind flooded with tomorrow's "to do list", make a list before bed. This way your thoughts will not constantly replay what needs to be accomplished the next day.

If after implementing these strategies there is no change in symptoms, an evaluation by a physician is recommended, to rule out any underlying physiological causes and to discuss medical treatment options.

*Courtesy of the American Sleep Association*